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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the text of a business and economics session at a conference on recent sociopolitical and socioeconomic developments in West Germany and the United States. Intended as a contribution to the dialogue between the two societies, the paper focuses on differences between average and sophisticated consumers within each country and between the two countries. Sophisticated consumers are identified as persons who subscribe to comparative product testing magazines. The basis of the longitudinal study was the belief that a consumer information gap is a major hindrance to improvement of the open-market economic system. To compare and contrast attitudes and knowledge of sophisticated and average consumers, members of the International Consumer Information Survey conducted personal interviews and mail surveys with over 1,500 persons in Germany and the United States in 1970 and 1976. Respondents were questioned regarding socioeconomic status; media use patterns; shopping concerns; purchasing behavior; and attitudes toward business, government, consumer protection, and advertising. Findings indicated that sophisticated consumers in both countries belong to upper socioeconomic strata, make greater use of printed advertising materials, reflect more favorable attitudes toward business and government, and are more concerned with availability of product information. The conclusion is that average and sophisticated consumer attitudes differ importantly within each country but are strikingly similar among consumers of both countries. Implications for governmental and industrial economic policies are discussed. (Author/DB)

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COMPARATIVE LONGITUDINAL CONSUMER INFORMATION RESEARCH IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

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COMPARATIVE LONGITUDINAL CONSUMER INFORMATION RESEARCH

IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

Hans B. Thorelli - Helmut Becker - Jack Engledow

This paper was presented in the session on Business and Economics at the Conference on "West Germany and the United States: A Systems Comparison Analysis," Indiana University, April 12-17, 1977. This conference was part of a research and publications project on the two countries, under a grant from Stiftung Volkswagenwerk. The study is also part of the International Consumer Information Survey (ICIS) sponsored by the International Business Research Institute of Indiana University, and supported by the Consumer Research Institute, Washington, D.C.

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Abstract

Subscribers to comparative product testing magazines are compared with average consumers in Germany and the United States. Marked differences are found between subscribers and average consumers as regards demographics, media habits, information consciousness, buying criteria, and attitudes to advertising. Value structures also differ importantly between German and American average consumers, but are strikingly similar among subscribers of both countries. Supporting Norwegian data affirm the conclusion that subscribers are part of the cosmopolitan set of consumer sophisticates in industrially advanced countries, a group labeled the Information Seekers. In a longitudinal extension using 1976 data, the important question is addressed, to what extent are the values of this Information Seeker segment changing over time? Average consumers and Information Seekers represent two vastly different challenges, for private and public consumer policy in general and information policy in particular.

German Studies Notes make available to interested persons and institutions a variety of research reports and working papers produced as part of the project "West Germany and the United States: A Systems Comparison Analysis." Topics relate to recent socio-political and socio-economic questions, problems of fiscal policy, political and vocational education, the environment, public administration, and other social and broadly cultural themes. The focus of these papers is on the sixties and seventies. Their principal purpose is to contribute to the dialogue between the two societies by offering analyses and alternatives based on our respective experiences.

Inquiries regarding project publications should be addressed to the Institute of German Studies.

Eberhard Reichmann
Project Director and Editor-in-Chief

COMPARATIVE LONGITUDINAL CONSUMER INFORMATION RESEARCH IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

Hans B. Thorelli - Helmut Becker - Jack Engledow

I. PREMISE AND PURPOSE

A. Premise: Affirmative Action in Open Markets. Although the countries of the West[1] all have mixed economies (from time to time they even seem mixed up), these economies are all ultimately based on open markets and decentralized decisions. The open market system has many deficiencies. In order to reduce such deficiencies nations in the last half-century have relied increasingly on direct regulation or government operations (market replacement policies), with results which have indeed been "mixed." Apart from the introduction of antitrust policy more or less loosely patterned on the American model in most of these countries in the last thirty years surprisingly little attention has been given to measures intended to facilitate the functioning of open markets (market improvement policies).

Our own philosophy is that much is to be gained by fortifying the operation of open markets, thereby reducing the need for direct intervention. If you permit a metaphor, we believe that there is indeed an important distinction to be made between promoting open markets in the manner we promote the free flow of traffic by means of stoplights, road signs, and patrol cars on one hand, and managing the economy by in effect placing a government representative in each car to regulate the driving on the other. Antitrust policy in its original sense is perhaps the most classic example of the fact that it is indeed possible to use government means to improve open markets.[2] This seeming paradox never ceases to amaze those unfamiliar with the spirit and purpose of antitrust.

Antitrust attacks dysfunctions in structure and conduct among sellers, that is, the supply side of the marketplace. Conceptually, it must be equally possible--and desirable--to improve the market system by strengthening the position of the consumers on the demand side of the marketplace. At the practical level there are a number of deficiencies in the system from a buyer point of view, as witnessed by the growth of consumerism.

In our view the most important of these imperfections is the existence of Consumer Information Gap. With each passing day the assumption that consumers have perfect knowledge about alternative offerings in all markets is becoming increasingly unrealistic. There are any number of reasons for the gap in consumer informedness. The most important reasons are the proliferation of products, brands, and models, the growing complexity of products, the greater rapidity of change in product characteristics. To this must be added the vast functional, geographic and communications distance between producer and consumer in a society of mass production cum mass distribution, the fact that commercial information is sometimes deceptive and that thousands of brands and models are simply not available for personal inspection in communities of, say, 100,000 inhabitants or less.

There is, we think, a crying need of achieving a greater degree of what our German friends call Markttransparenz.

Improved consumer awareness of market offerings is clearly a worthwhile end in itself. Indeed, in the end the only rationale of the market system as a whole is to provide consumer satisfactions. Better informed consumers will also induce the open market system to work better by promoting competition based on the inherent merits of products as weighed against price. It is thus to us especially significant that at this German-American Comparative Systems conference back-to-back half-day sessions are devoted to such kingpins of open-market affirmative-action policy as antitrust and consumer information. This significance is further enhanced by the fact that Germany and the United States are not only the two leading open market economies in the world today but also have pioneered in the development of antitrust and consumer information policy.

B. The International Consumer Information Survey (ICIS). The ICIS project embraced a series of studies carried out in the eight-year period 1969-76 under the guidance of Hans B. Thorelli. As associates in the project we wish to express our gratitude to the School of Business at Indiana University (acting through the International Business Research Institute) and to the Consumer Research Institute of Washington, D.C., for generous financial assistance. The ICIS project resulted in three books and a score of articles.

The first book, entitled Consumer Information Handbook: Europe and North America,[3] was written by Hans B. and Sarah V. Thorelli. It is a detailed survey of independent consumer information (CI) programs, notably comparative testing, informative labeling and quality certifying organizations, in the North Atlantic community of nations. For each nation, it examines these programs in relation to local consumer policy, standardization activities, and government-business relations. Another book, Consumer Information Systems and Consumer Policy[4] also authored by the Thorelli team, deals with CI programs generically (rather than by country), and from a systems viewpoint. The nature, anatomy and operation problems of different types of CI programs are analyzed in detail. The programs of CI organizations--given the collective epithet the Testmakers--are then related to other mainsprings of product information, notably advertising and other commercial sources, and to personal experience and contacts. An ecologic approach is applied to the examination of interaction between CI systems and the economic, social and political environment in which they operate. The futurology of CI systems and consumer policy is discussed in terms of alternate scenarios.

Our session today springs from the research reported in the third volume, The Information Seekers--An International Study of Consumer Information and Advertising Image, which was written by the authors of this paper. It starts from the premise that for CI to be useful, there must also be an audience of consumers willing to assimilate the information

and make use of it in the buying process. The Information Seekers undertakes to identify this audience, comparing its characteristics in Germany and the United States. The book furnishes both the background and the point of departure for today's session. Jack Engledow and Helmut Becker, in association with Dr. Ronald Anderson of Indiana University, have just completed a partial "update" study of The Information Seekers. The object has been to establish to what extent the patterns in attitude and behavior of German and American consumer sophisticates reported in that volume are stable over time--that is, from 1970 to 1976--and in what respects they may be changing. To this question we will address ourselves later on in this paper, making use of data reported for the first time here.

The ICIS project is finished, but as this longitudinal extension demonstrates, it is far from dead. Another off-shoot project, undertaken by Hans B. Thorelli in association with Dr. Gerald E. Sentell and staff of the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) in Bangkok, has been sponsored by MUCIA, the Midwest Universities Consortium for International Affairs. This is a pioneer study of consumer policy and consumer problems in a less developed country (LDC) based on a field survey of the Thai experience. The research is premised on the notion that modern marketing in general and what may indeed be called "consumers liberation" in particular are indispensible and yet sadly neglected instrumentalities in LDCs wishing to achieve that challenging combination: economic development cum political democracy. Much of the research is structured in terms directly comparable with those of our German-American survey. Our findings will be reported in a separate monograph.

C. Purpose of the German-American Consumer Research. It is customary to distinguish between personal, commercial and independent sources of product information. Of these we have defined independent consumer information (CI) as the data about products and services emanating from organizations which themselves have no economic interest in these offerings. The study is concerned with all these types of sources of product information. It is, however, focused on the most important variants of CI and commercial information, that is, on comparative testing, as reported in product test journals, and on advertising.

Key objectives of the original research were:

1. To explore the degree to which and the manner in which product test reports are used, and to compare such usage with the use of personal and commercial information sources by consumers.

2. To cast our research in a comparative mold in order to establish whether information-minded consumers tend to have similar characteristics across cultures, or, in other words, whether there is a cosmopolitan group of Information Seekers. We also wanted to identify to what extent the attitudes of various categories of consumers in industrially advanced countries seem to be culture-specific rather than cosmopolitan.

3. To query subscribers to product test reports and average consumers as to their attitudes toward current advertising in several dimensions, and to examine linkages we assumed to exist between use of and attitudes to CI and attitudes to advertising.

4. To relate our own research to other similar studies, such as the Bauer-Greyser study of advertising in the United States[5] and the study of CI and advertising in Norway cosponsored by the local Consumer Council and ICIS.[6]

The objective of the German-American longitudinal "update" study has been to establish to what extent the patterns in attitude and behavior of consumer sophisticates were stable and in what respects they were changing in the period 1970-76.

As we regard the CI area as the most significant part of our work, this part will be given primary attention in this summary presentation.

D. Rationale for Comparative Systems Research. Data gathering, analysis and interpretation are immensely complicated in cross-cultural research. Naturally, too, the resource inputs become considerably greater than if the research were confined to a single environment. For these reasons, multi-national research projects based on field surveys are still relatively rare; each such project represents a bit of pioneering in and of itself. This is especially true when the research also has a longitudinal dimension, as in the present case. In spite of the complications involved several considerations prompted our German-American research venture.

Product testing and reporting originated in the United States, but in the last twenty-five years has developed rapidly and diversely in Germany. The largest CI organization in the world is Consumers Union of the United States (CU), a consumer-sponsored organization having no official ties to either government or business. By contrast, neither of the two German consumer product testing organizations is consumer-based. Stiftung Warentest is a foundation organized and financially sponsored by the government. The foundation is largely free from day-to-day ministerial influence, but works in closer cooperation with business than CU. The second German organization, DM, is a privately owned publishing venture. DM has been notably more free-wheeling than CU, in that advertising is routinely solicited from business. We were curious to see whether there appeared to be any systematic differences in the images of the three agencies among consumers.

With increasing affluence, better communication, wide-spread travel and greater product similarities between countries, there is reason to believe that consumer behavior attitudes and information processing is becoming less culture-specific. As indicated earlier, we wanted to establish whether there is a cross-cultural consumer elite, and what its characteristics are.

Another important rationale for the comparative approach chosen was its presumed usefulness to public as well as private consumer policy makers. Cross-cultural research provides some fascinating issues as regards the transferability of experience and program technology from one national setting to the other. Some policy implications of our research are discussed in the final section of this paper.

II. METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING

A. Subscribers (Subs) and Average Consumers (AC). The overall strategy of this research is to compare and contrast samples of subscribers to product testing magazines (Subs) and average consumers (AC) in Germany and the United States on a broad range of demographic and socio-economic, attitudinal and behavioral criteria. In effect, we are hypothesizing that Subs are the most readily identifiable and empirically reachable group of consumers with a very high concentration of Information Seekers (IS). Inevitably, a certain proportion of IS are also non-subscribers, (focusing their info search effort on other sources than testing journals or borrowing copies of these journals) and therefore included among our AC samples. The AC samples, of course, should also be expected to contain a number of subs, corresponding roughly to the test journal subscription rate in the household population as a whole. Finally, one must expect some Subs not to be Information Seekers. The subscription may be an unwelcome gift, or, as circumstantial evidence suggests, occasionally a mere status symbol.

B. Data Collection and Sampling. The data for this research project were collected via a standardized questionnaire schedule that was administered in tightly coordinated field surveys to various samples of Subs and AC each in Germany and the United States:

1. Personal interview surveys were conducted in 1970 in the metropolitan areas of Frankfurt (Germany) and Indianapolis (United States) comprising samples of 100 Subs and 200 ACs in each.
2. National samples of over 600 Subs each in Germany and the U.S. were surveyed by mail, also in 1970.
3. National samples of 600 Subs or more were again surveyed by mail in 1976 in both countries.

The sampling plan for the metropolitan AC respondents consisted of a randomized stratified clustering procedure utilizing city maps, criss-cross city directories, city districts or zip code areas, and city blocks within these areas. The sampling procedure was carried out identically in both Frankfurt and Indianapolis to assure not only representativeness but also comparability. Regarding the representativeness of the cities themselves it may be argued that Frankfurt is quite cosmopolitan whereas Indianapolis is somewhat provincial in comparison. Though probably not incorrect, a similar observation could be made about almost any pair of middle-sized metropolitan areas in the two countries. The reason for choosing metropolitan rather than national samples for this phase of the research was the decision of the research team not solely to rely on mail responses for the entire project as well as budgetary constraints. Besides being similar in size (about 700,000 inhabitants) it may be observed that both cities frequently serve as test markets and in general are judged to be as representative as any city that may have been chosen by other means.

The subscriber respondents for the metropolitan and national samples for the 1970 and 1976 surveys were systematically randomly selected from lists supplied by the

publishing organizations of the product testing magazines involved in this study: Consumers Union in the United States, publisher of Consumer Reports (CR), the Stiftung Warentest in Berlin, Germany, publisher of test, and the DM-Verlag (1970 only) in Frankfurt, Germany, publisher of DM. While DM may be a bit more "popular" in makeup and character, the informational content of all three is similar in nature, the focus being on comparative product test reports.

Tho questionnaire consisted of rating and ranking scales, Likert attitude statements, aided and unaided recall questions, and was on the whole highly structured. Pretested in both languages, the survey instrument included the following relevant variables:[7]

1. demographic and socioeconomic consumer characteristics;
2. selected attitudes (planfulness, liberal/conservative, innovator, opinion leader, government, business, social welfare, and general and specific attitudes toward product test reports and advertising);
3. media usage habits (television, radio, printed media);
4. buying concerns (general and specific; quality, durability, economy of operation, product availability, price, credit, information availability) in two specific purchase situations, a durable product and an automobile.)
5. information sources perceived as important in the buying process (personal, independent and commercial sources).

The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it could be used for interviewing in the metropolitan surveys as well as for self-administration in the case of the national mail surveys. Subsequent statistical tests showed a high degree of similarity between the metropolitan and national survey results and no systematic bias was indicated that might have been attributable to the two different data collection methods. The data lent themselves to a variety of non-parametric statistical tests. The tests most frequently used in the analysis were the Chi Square (X^2) for normally scaled data and the Mann Whitney U test for ordinally scaled data.[8]

C. Plan of Comparative Analysis. cross-cultural analysis it was obviously essential to include aspects of the broader educational, cultural, political and economic environments in Germany and the United States insofar as one might perceive them as germane to the explanation of similarities and differences observed. The general framework employed for international comparisons in this project is suggested by Figure 1. Within that framework, the sampling scheme described above allowed for the necessary cross-sectional and longitudinal data comparisons on at least three levels as illustrated in Figure 2.

Level I. Country-by-country, sub-cultural comparisons (i.e. within Germany and within the U.S.) between subscribers to product testing reports and average consumers.

Level II. Cross-cultural comparisons of individual consumer sectors between Germany and the U.S. The two consumer sectors involved in this study for cross-cultural comparisons are: (1) German Subs versus American Subs. (2) German ACs versus American Acs.[9]

Level III. Cross-cultural comparisons of sectoral differences and similarities in Germany and the U.S.

FIGURE 1

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS FOR THE GERMAN AND AMERICAN COUNTRY STUDIES

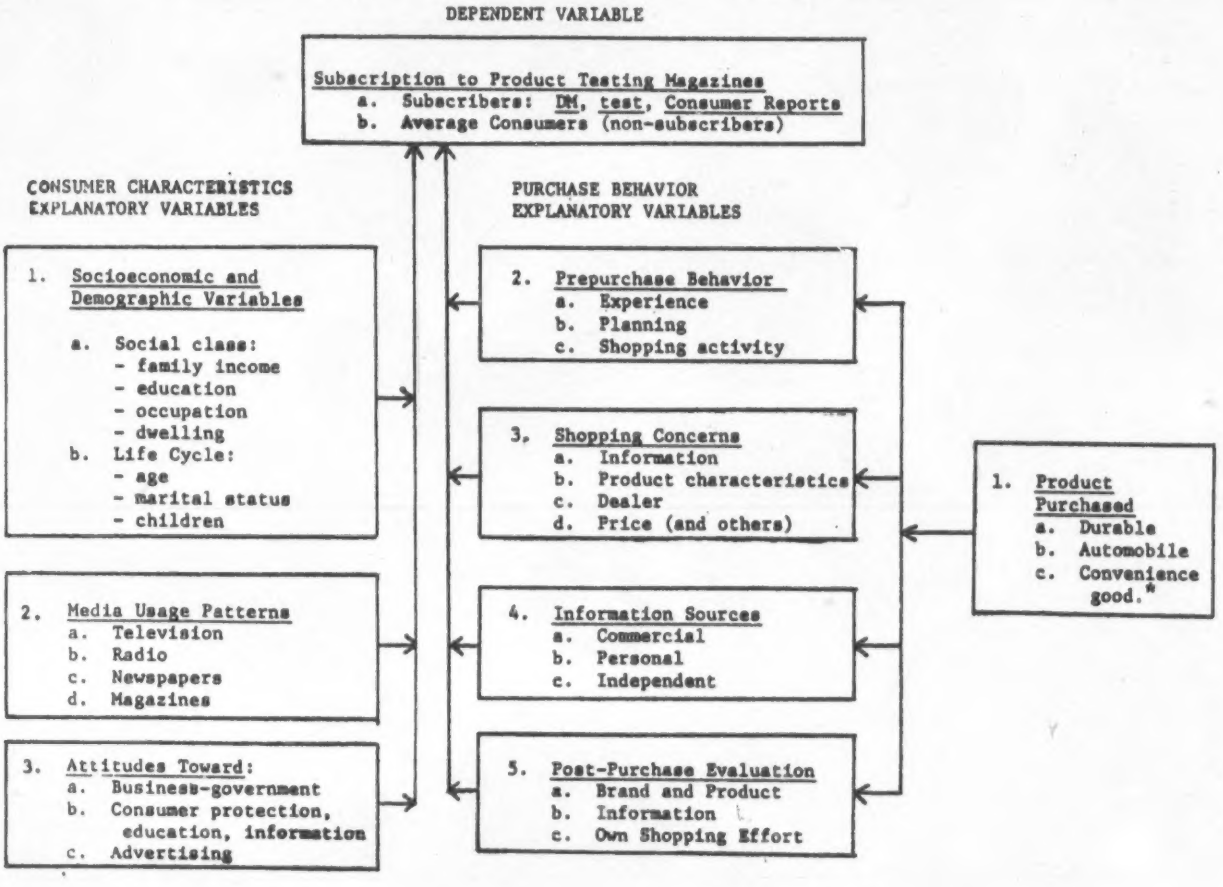
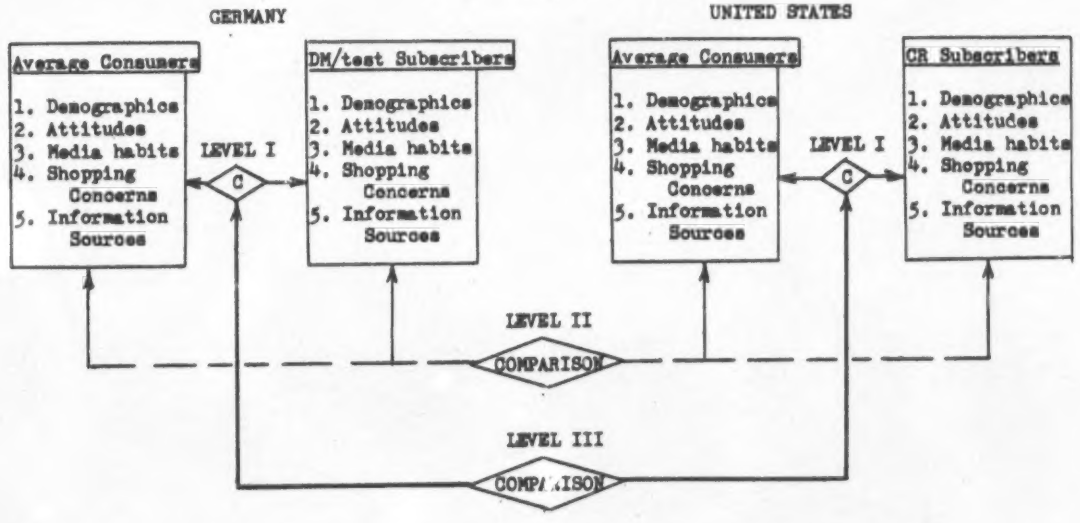


FIGURE 2

FRAMEWORK FOR COMPARISON



Explanation: Level I. Within country comparison of two consumer sectors.
Level II. Cross-cultural comparison of individual consumer sectors in Germany and the U.S.
Level III. Cross-cultural comparison of the two consumer sectors in Germany and the U.S.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF SUBSCRIBERS AND AVERAGE CONSUMERS ON IMPORTANT DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

	United States		Germany	
Family Income Per Year/Month	Subscriber (Base = 101)	Average Consumer (Base = 200)	Subscriber (Base = 97)	Average Consumer (Base = 198)
$25,000 & over/DM 2,500 & over	6%	4%	18%	9%
15,000-24,999/DM 2,000-2,499	35	14	15	8
10,000-14,999/DM 1,500-1,999	32	25	18	16
5,000- 9,999/DM 1,000-1,499	19	27	21	24
Under $5,000 /DM Under 1,000	4	17	2	20
No Answer /No Answer	4	13	26	23
	100%*	100%	100%*	100%
Education of Head of Household				
16 years and more	22%	10%	30%	12%
16 years	22	11	---	---
13-15 years	19	19	19	14
12 years	27	34	7	7
9-11 years	8	10	44	41
Less than 9 years	2	16	0	26
	100%*	100%	100%*	100%
Occupation of Head of Household				
Professional, technical	33%	16%	28%	26%
Proprietor, manager, official	19	11	24	9
Clerical, sales	15	13	22	14
Craftsman, foreman, service	14	18	4	14
Operative, laborer	11	24	10	9
Retired, others	8	18	4	10
No answer, not classified	---	---	8	18
	100%**	100%	100%**	100%
Age of Respondent				
Under 25 years	3%	15%	4%	15%
25-34	25	21	28	31
35-44	20	14	32	21
45-54	26	19	17	17
55-64	16	16	14	11
65 and over	10	15	5	5
	100%n	100%	100%n	100%

* Indicates higher group based on MWU test, significant, $p < .001$
** Based on Chi Square test. Indicates higher group by inspection, significant, $p < .01$
n Indicates higher group based on MWU test, not significant.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF PERCEIVED EXPOSURE TO VARIOUS MEDIA
(by percentages)

	United States		Germany	
Television	Subscriber (Base = 101)	Average Consumer (Base = 200)	Subscriber (Base = 97)	Average Consumer (Base = 198)
No viewing	0%	3%	13%	7%
1-6 hours per week	31	21	31	30
7-18 hours per week	37	31	46	43
19 or more hours per week	32	45*	10	20*
Radio				
No listening	2%	11%	18%	10%
1-6 hours per week	54	32	40	50
7-18 hours per week	27	18	28	26
19 or more hours per week	17	39*	14	14*
Newspapers				
None read	2%	8%	7%	14%
1 per day	54	64	68	75
2 per day	37	27	21	9
3 or more per day	7**	1	4**	2
Magazines (Number per Respondent)				
Subscribe to:				
Including CR/DM, test	2.2	.9	1.7	.3
Excluding CR/DM, test	1.2	.7	.7	.3
Read regularly:				
Including CR/DM, test	2.3	1.1	2.1	.9
Excluding CR/DM, test	1.4	1.0	1.2	.8

* Indicates higher group based on MWU test, $p < .05$
** Indicates higher group based on MWU test, $p < .01$

Within country, sub-cultural comparisons of Subs and ACs (LEVEL I) based on the 1970 metropolitan data have been reported on in depth elsewhere as part of the International Consumer Information Survey (ICIS) of Indiana University.[10]

In addition and also as part of this same project, various aspects of the cross-cultural comparisons of the national Subs samples (LEVEL II) and the agencies which disseminate this kind of independent product information to the consuming public have

been published in separate volumes.[11] This paper will first concentrate on some of the more interesting German/American Subs-ACs differences and similarities (LEVEL III) based on the 1970 metropolitan interview surveys. Next, based on the 1970 national mail surveys in both the U.S. and Germany a summary picture of what we have labeled the Cosmopolitan Information Seeker (IS) is presented (LEVEL II). Finally, the 1976 national mail surveys are used in the longitudinal extension of the ICIS project to look at the important question: In what ways have the Information Seekers changed during the past seven years?

III. SUB-AC COMPARISONS: SOME GERMAN/AMERICAN FINDINGS

A. Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics: Consumer Reports. Subs in the United States and DM and test Subs in Germany quite apparently belong to the upper social strata in comparison to the AC respondents. There was little difference between DM and test Subs on the one hand, and CR Subs on the other. But compared to the general population samples in both countries, Subs scored significantly (word used in its statistical meaning) higher than ACs on three important socioeconomic variables (Proposition 1).[12] Thus, commensurate with their higher level occupations, Subs as a group enjoy a significantly higher family income than ACs, and they are much better educated through the college/university level. (See Table 1). And none of the German and only two percent of the American Sub respondents had less than nine years of formal education compared to 16 percent and 26 percent for the American and German AC samples, respectively.

Additionally, the housing variables (e.g. neighborhood, house type, expenditure for housing) have been found to be effective social class discriminators in the United States.[13] This is not nearly so much the case in Germany. In his study on social stratification, Scheuch, for instance, included occupation, education, and income in his social prestige index, but notably excluded any housing variables.[14] This cross-cultural difference is apparent in an analoguous way in this study. Thus, American Subs in comparison to the American AC respondents, were significantly more likely to own their home versus rent, to live in single family houses versus apartments, and to occupy a greater number of rooms in either apartments or houses. Among the German respondents none of the Sub-AC differences on the housing variables were statistically significant. Indeed, the incidence of home ownership among both the German subscriber and non-subscriber in the sample was somewhat below the national average of 35%. The reason for this is attributable to the fact that the survey was conducted in Frankfurt, a large metropolitan area. According to a recent survey by the DIVO Institute, there is a negative correlation between home ownership and the size of the community; the smaller the city or town, the greater the proportion of home ownership, and vice versa.[15]

Regarding the life cycle variables, Subs of product test reports in both countries compared to the general population, were more often married and they were older (significantly so in Germany, Prop. 2). In neither country was there a difference between the two samples with respect to household size and the number of children. However, in both Germany and the U.S. subscriptions are typically listed under the name of the male heads of household.

B. Media Usage Habits. There are distinct Sub-AC differences with respect to media usage patterns, differences which are significant across national cultures (Prop. 7). As would be expected from members of higher social strata, Subs in both countries make greater use of printed materials while AC rely more on the broadcast media. (See Table 2.)

Thus, Sub respondents read newspapers and magazines more often and more regularly than the general public. This comparison holds even after excluding CR as well as LM and test from the American and German lists of magazines, respectively. At the same time there is a qualitative difference common in both countries. AC tend to read (when and if they read) so-called "lowbrow" magazines, represented by Neue Revue and Bunte Illustrierte in Germany and Modern Romance and Women's Day in the United States. Subs, on the other hand, are more prone to read "highbrow" magazines such as Playboy and New Yorker in the United States and der Spiegel and Capital in Germany. Because American as well as German AC watch significantly more television and also listen more to the radio, the non-subscribing respondents accordingly reported greater use of the respective programming magazines, Hoer Zu! in Germany and TV Guide in the U.S.

It is interesting to note, however, that American Subs as well as American AC perceive themselves as more avid readers than their German counterparts, at least in quantitative terms (i.e. the number of newspapers or magazines read regularly or occasionally). In qualitative terms the difference may well be much less than what these figures would seem to reveal. For instance, the thorough German is more likely to read a newspaper, a magazine, or even a book from cover to cover than the more easy-going American.

C. Attitudes. To the extent that buying behavior is enhanced or inhibited by certain attitudes, one would expect to find varying attitudinal patterns between Sub and AC groups. (See Table 3). On the conservative-liberal spectrum, for example, as measured by the screening question, "You can (cannot) change human nature," AC responded in a more conservative way in both the U.S. and Germany. But both German samples reflected greater relative conservatism on this question than their American counterparts. On the other hand, on the questions of government control over business and on social welfare policy, Americans responded more conservatively than Germans. Given the differing government and social history of the two countries, this result was not unexpected.

TABLE 3

GENERAL ATTITUDE COMPARISONS
(by Index numbers[a])

Attitude Questions	United States		Germany	
	Subs. (N = 101)	AC's (N = 200)	Subs. (N = 97)	AC's (N = 198)
Planfulness				
Enjoy Planning work	70[n]	63	54[n]	51
Better at getting value for money	28**	-10	29**	-24
Liberal-Conservative				
You can change human nature	11*	-14	-17[n]	-33
Government should control business more	-42	-27*	46**	21
Students should have more power	-43	-32**	28	31[n]
Welfare does not cause less work	-50	-35[n]	-19	23**
Opinion Leadership				
Likely to influence group opinion	31**	0	15**	-5
Likely to be asked advice	6[n]	-8	34**	9
Early Adopter				
Usually tries brands before others	-19	-8[n]	-1	14[n]
Usually one of first to buy new product	-34	-24[n]	-21[n]	-33
Business				
Businessmen are as honest as others	55**	41	23[n]	17
Business performs its job well	27**	14	14*	-4
Advertising				
Overall attitude is favorable	48	66**	41[n]	38

[a]Index = (% sample agree or strongly agree minus % sample disagree or strongly disagree). Positive index indicates general agreement, negative index means disagreement.

Statistical significance by Mann Whitney U Test

[n] Indicates higher group, not significant.
* Indicates higher group, $p < .05$
** Indicates higher group, $p < .01$

In both countries Subs reflected a more favorable attitude toward business ("businessmen are as honest as other people") than their respective AC counterparts. As regards the attitude toward advertising in general, Subs again showed a remarkable similarity in their relatively positive view across both countries. However, American Subs were much less favorable and German Subs more favorable than American and German ACs respectively.

Similar patterns can also be observed in the buying-related attitudes. Subs in both countries perceived themselves as better planners than AC (Prop. 3), and the Americans even better than the Germans. As a results, Subs on both sides of the Atlantic think they get "better value for their money" when it comes to buying products. Finally and again mutually, Subs perceive themselves more likely as opinion leaders compared to AC. That is, they feel that their advice is sought by others when it comes to buying a product, but they do not profess to be innovators (Props. 4,5).

D. Shopping Concerns. Contrary to expectations, Subs did not seem to be greatly more concerned about criteria that would seem important in a purchase decision than the general population respondents. In the two purchase situations included in the survey--a durable product and an automobile bought within the last two years--"rational" criteria such as performance, durability, service after purchase, and warranty ranked high among AC and Subs of both countries, although not necessarily in the same order. (See Table 4.) Price is mutually ranked in a neutral to "unimportant" position. This may be so because of the perceived inability of consumers to directly influence price, since price bargaining is not normally practiced in either culture in the majority of purchase decisions (Prop. 10).

TABLE 4

SHOPPING CRITERIA IMPORTANCE RATINGS
DURABLE PRODUCT & AUTO PURCHASES COMBINED
(By Index Numbers[a])

	United States				Germany			
	R	S	R	AC	S-AC	R	S	R	AC	S-AC
Performance	1.	95	1.	89	+ 6	1.	96	1.	96	0
Durability	2.	93	2.	88	+ 5	2.	95	2.	92	+ 3
Brand Reputation	3.	90	4.	74	+16	7.	74	4.	71	+ 3
Service	4.	73	3.	77	- 4	3.	81	5.	69	+12
Information Availability	5.	72	8.	57	+15	4.	77	7.	48	+29
Price	6.	69	6.	71	- 2	10.	27	11.	16	+11
Warranty	7.	67	5.	72	- 5	6.	75	3.	72	+ 3
Dealer Reputation	8.	62	7.	69	- 7	11.	17	10.	16	+ 1
Styling	9.	43	10.	53	-10	8.	57	9.	40	+17
Economy of Operation	10.	36	9.	57	-21	5.	76	6.	67	+ 9
Product Availability	11.	33	11.	52	-19	9.	38	8.	44	- 6
Dealer Location	12.	6	12.	16	-10	12.	8	12.	6	+ 2
Credit	13.	-49	13.	7	-56	13.	-60	13.	-59	- 1

Legend: R = Rank
S = Subscriber Respondents
AC = Average Consumer Respondents
S-AC = Difference in Importance Index. Positive difference indicates higher rating by subscribers; negative higher rating by AC's.
[a]Index = (% sample rating important or very important minus % sample rating unimportant or very unimportant). Positive index means relatively important, negative index means relatively unimportant.

Credit availability is mutually ranked lowest in importance (Prop. 9). However, several interesting idiosyncracies of the groups and nationalities can be noted. Germans ranked credit as considerably less important than Americans in general, reflecting the traditionally negative German attitude toward borrowing.[16] Whereas both German samples exhibited nearly the same large degree of indifference toward the availability of consumer credit, American ACs were much more approving compared to American Subs, particularly in the automobile purchase situation.

The "availability of product information," while not rated as the most important purchasing factor by any of the respondent groups, turned out to be the one criterion, which produced the most consistent Sub-AC difference in both countries. In Germany as well as in the U.S. Subs found information availability a significantly higher shopping concern than AC. Indeed, the German Sub-AC difference for information availability was greater in the predicted direction than any other concern included in the questionnaire.

E. Information Sources. For analytical purposes these were divided into personal, commercial, and independent information sources. While the meaning of personal and commercial sources is assumed to be self-understood, "independent" consumer information (CI) may require a word of explanation. With CI here is meant the product information which is disseminated by various public and private agencies and organization to the consuming public. Such CI may take different forms, including quality certificates or seals of approval, informative labeling, and comparative product testing and reporting. These types of CI, often thought to be more objective than other forms of consumer information, particularly of the commercial variety, are here called "independent" CI, because the dispensing agencies are presumed to be independent of any commercial interest that may result from the sale of products themselves. Consumer Reports in the United States and DM and test in Germany are examples of this kind of "independent" CI.

As expected, Subs tended to rate more information sources of all types higher in their purchase decisions than the AC respondents. (See Table 5.) Indeed, in the case of the automobile purchase in Germany, all information sources were more important to Subs than to ACs.

TABLE 5

INFORMATION SOURCES IMPORTANCE RATINGS
DURABLE PRODUCT & AUTO PURCHASES COMBINED
(by Index Numbers[a])

	United States			Germany		
	R S	R AC	S-AC	R S	R AC	S-AC
Personal Observation	1. 32	1. 46	-14	1. 79	1. 79	0
Past Experience	2. 29	2. 32	- 3	2. 45	2. 42	+ 3
Friends, Relatives, etc.	3. 25	3. 24	+ 1	5. 27	3. 24	+ 3
Consumer Reports	4. 23	8. 3	+20	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
DM	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3. 35	7. -33	+68
test	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4. 24	8. -36	+60
Other Sources	5. 20	5. 13	+ 7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Advertising	6. 17	6. 12	+ 5	7. -20	4. -20	0
Salesman	7. 12	4. 15	- 3	9. -37	6. -31	- 6
Other Mag's or Newsp.	8. 2	7. 4	- 2	6. 27	5. -20	+47
Other Consumer Mag's	9. 1	9. 0	+ 1	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Consumer Centers	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	8. -27	9. -38	+11

Legend: R = Rank
S = Subscriber Respondents
AC = Average Consumer Respondents
S-AC = Difference in Importance Index. Positive difference indicates higher rating by subscribers; negative higher rating by AC's.
[a]Index = (% sample rating important or very important minus % sample unimportant or very unimportant). Positive index means relatively important; negative index relatively unimportant.
n.a. = not applicable

Personal information was almost universally rated as a most important source by respondents in both countries and in most cases ahead of independent as well as commercial sources. Thus, consumers in general seem to think of personal observation along with past experience and advice from friends and relatives as superior sources of product information than some of the more obvious independent and commercial ones. Nevertheless and especially in view of the aided recall used for this particular question in Germany,

it is natural and reassuring to find the test journals so highly ranked. And we may note that in the U.S. Subs ranked CR as number one source in durable product purchase situation even on the basis of unaided recall. Non-subscribing AC rated commercial sources (advertising, salesmen) higher than independent ones in both countries.

F. Advertising Attitudes. Respondents were invited to state their general attitude and their views on particular aspects of advertising in the manner indicated by Bauer and Greyser.[17] In both countries the overall attitude was a positive one. As indicated by Table 6, Americans (as represented by Indianapolis residents) had a more favorable general view of advertising than Germans (as represented by Frankfurt residents). However, the contrast was much more marked with regard to AC than to Subs. Thus, American Subs are a great deal less positive about advertising in general than American ACs while German Subs tend to be mildly more favorable than German ACs.

TABLE 6

GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARD ADVERTISING
SUBSCRIBERS COMPARED TO AVERAGE CONSUMERS
GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES

FRANKFURT AND INDIANAPOLIS SAMPLES

Question: On the whole, would you say your attitude about advertising was favorable or unfavorable?

Degree of Attitude	United States		Germany	
	Subscribers (Base=101)	Average Consumers (Base=200)	Subscribers (Base=97)	Average Consumers (Base=198)
Strongly favorable	5%	5%	6%	4%
Favorable	41	59	25	24
Slightly favorable	23	14	34	31
Mixed	11	9	9	20
Slightly unfavorable	9	4	14	13
Unfavorable	8	5	6	6
Strongly unfavorable	4	3	4	2
No opinion	0	1	1	1
Overall Attitude Index[a]	48	66	41	38

[a]Index = (% of sample favorable in whole or in part, minus % of sample unfavorable).

In comparing attitudes to particular aspects of advertising, the Indianapolis metro population (aggregating Subs and AC) was again more favorable on every score than the Frankfurt population (Table 7). A comparison of independently taken national surveys in 1969 evidenced a more mixed picture.[18] Note that the propositions that advertising is essential and that it results in better products were agreed to in all samples accounted for in the table, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Conversely, all samples disagreed with the statement that advertising results in lower prices and, even stronger, with the idea that advertising "does not persuade people to buy things they shouldn't buy." (Prop. 18).[19]

TABLE 7

ATTITUDES TOWARD PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF ADVERTISING
IN GERMANY AND THE UNITED STATES
METROPOLITAN AND NATIONAL DATA COMPARED

(In Index Numbers[a])

Statements	United States			Germany	
	Indianapolis 1970	National 1964*	National 1969**	Frankfurt 1970	National 1969***
Advertising...					
1) ...is essential	86	60	57	40	37
2) ...results in better products	55	60	40	12	41
3) ...results in lower prices	-22	- 5	-29	-28	-25
4) ...presents a true picture	- 3	-12	-24	-20	3
5) ...does not persuade people	-42	-34	-45	-50	-24

[a]Index = (% of sample agreeing slightly or strongly with statement minus % of sample disagreeing slightly or strongly).

SOURCES: Our own surveys in Indianapolis and Frankfurt, and
* Raymond A. Bauer and Stephan A. Greyser, Advertising in America: The Consumer View (1968), p. 102.
** Gallup Organization Survey of December 1969.
*** The Readers' Digest Association, A Survey of Europe Today (1970), pp. 186-7.

Our data also demonstrate that, on the whole, there is a positive relationship between attitudes to advertising as a medium and the perceived importance of advertising as an information source in specific purchases of automobiles and consumer durables. (Prop. 19). Finally we may note that people who tend to have an unfavorable image of advertising in general will also tend to have a more favorable view of comparative testing than people who have a favorable attitude toward advertising. The same relationship prevails when the comparison between people with favorable and unfavorable attitudes to advertising in general is extended to a series of specific attributes of advertising and testing as information sources (Prop. 20). Subs in both Germany and the U.S. indicate stronger preferences than do AC for testing than advertising on most specific attributes.

G. Cross-Cultural Universals

Figure 3 presents a summary of the Sub-AC differences and similarities that resulted from the German (Frankfurt) and U.S. (Indianapolis) surveys. It includes all the variables where the individual country studies (LEVEL I comparisons) had revealed statistically significant differences between Subs and AC as well as those which were more neutral. An example will serve to demonstrate how Figure 3 is to be interpreted: In the U.S. "household income" of Subs was significantly higher than that of AC putting this variable in the left column (labeled "US Subscribers High").

Therefore "income" appears in the upper left hand cell in Figure 3 as a "cross-cultural universal." (Cell A.) Conversely, Subs in both countries watch significantly less TV and listen less to radio compared to AC, putting that outcome into the lower right hand cell as another "universal." (Cell I.) In Cells A and I, then, the variables listed exhibit the high degree of commonality that was found between the German and American Subs. Cell C on the other hand shows the variables which reflected the largest differences between Subs in Germany and the U.S. The data here indicate that German Subs were generally more satisfied both with their buying experience and with the durable products and autos bought than AC (Prop. 11). In the U.S. only those Subs who said they actually used the product test information in the respective purchases were more satisfied than AC.

FIGURE 3

SUMMARY OF COMPARISONS WITHIN COUNTRIES

U.S. Comparisons
Subscribers vs. Average Consumers

German Comparisons: Subscribers vs. Average Consumers	U.S. Subscribers High (compared to AC)	Neutral[a]	U.S. Subscribers Low (compared to AC)
German Subscribers High (compared to AC)	A. Universal "Highs" for all Subs Demographics: Income Education Social Class Attitudes: Planfulness Business Opinion Leader Newspaper and Mag. Readership Shopping Concern: Available Info. Information Source: Product Testing Consumer Activity by Government Ownership of Selected durables	B. German High-U.S. Neutral Demographic: Age Information Source: Other newspaper or magazine Shopping Concern: Styling	C. German High-U.S. Low Attitude: Increased Govt. control of business Satisfaction Measures: All, including satisfaction with product and shopping activity and available information.
Neutral[a]	D. U.S. High-Germ. Neutral Attitude: General Liberalism Shopping Concern: Brand Reputation Increased Consumerist Activities	E. No Significant Difference From Average Consumer Most other variables not listed elsewhere fell into this category.	F. U.S. Low-German Neutral Attitudes: Advertising Student Power Shopping Concerns: Product Availability Economy of Operation Credit Information Source: Personal Observation
German Subscribers Low (compared to AC)	G. U.S. High-German Low None	H. German Low-U.S. Neutral Attitude: Welfare	I. Universal "Lows" for all Subs Television Viewing Radio Listening

[a]No significant difference between Subscribers and Average Consumers

On balance Figure 3 shows that the number of universals among Subs of both countries is far more extensive than the differences between them. Based on the 1970 national surveys of the subscriber populations in Germany and the U.S. the strength of these universals is explored further in the following section.

IV. GERMAN-AMERICAN COMPARISONS: 1970 NATIONAL SUBSCRIBER SURVEY

From the cross-cultural comparisons of the 1970 national Subs samples and comparable census data (where available) it is plainly evident that in both cultures the concentration of Subs in the higher spectra of education, occupation and income is significant. Indeed, the strong representation of Subs in the upper social strata within the national surveys in Germany and the U.S. was as pronounced as within the Frankfurt and Indianapolis samples (Props. 1 and 2). Our Norwegian data, included in another part of the overall project, show very similar results.[20]

With respect to the general attitudes, too, the similarities between the German and American national subs are on the whole striking. A notable exception is the liberal-conservative spectrum, where somewhat to our surprise, Americans tended to give more conservative answers. Our notion here would be that the differences in the particular area are heavily influenced by environmental circumstances. This is especially indicated with regard to "more government control of business," "more power to students," and "public welfare programs do not tend to make people work less hard," where German replies were more liberal. The U.S. has gone a great deal further than Germany in government control of business--at least in areas of immediate consumer interest. Too, the American higher educational system appears more student oriented than the German, whereas the German system of education has a stronger achievement orientation. It should also be noted that the U.S. at the time of the field survey had just come out of a brief but intense period of student unrest with which the population at large did not sympathize. On the whole, the more liberal attitude on the part of the German respondents may reflect the long tradition of social legislation in Germany dating back to Bismarck. But the spending on public welfare programs is in fact proportionately lower in Germany than in the U.S., the reason for this being that the German social structure is considerably more homogeneous than the American.

Contrary to their American counterpart in the metropolitan survey, German Subs were generally more satisfied with their purchasing experiences than German AC (Prop. 11). Extending this finding to the national surveys, German Subs were also more satisfied with their purchasing experiences than American Subs. Indeed, in the twelve possible comparisons (two products, three satisfaction dimensions, two questions each) German Subs perceived themselves as better satisfied than Americans in all twelve. It would appear that either Germans are easier to satisfy or German information and/or products are superior. Again, users of product test information were generally more satisfied with their purchases than non-users among the Subs of both countries. Interestingly, in both countries Subs tended more often to use product test recommendations in purchasing durables than automobiles.

Some 85 percent of American and 72 percent of German Subs do want specific brand recommendations as part of their comparative test reports. Our research confirms that Subs preserve their test reports. In both countries 50 percent of Subs keep their copies "indefinitely" and an additional 34 percent keep them for a year or two. Almost two-thirds of

Subs lend copies of their test journals to others. When asked to rate their satisfaction with their journals along several dimensions, Subs to the three magazines gave strikingly similar--and generally high--rankings. We may note, however, that DM--the only commercially sponsored magazine--ranks a bit lower than government-sponsored test and consumer-sponsored CR on reliability and credibility (Prop. 16).

A. National Subscriber Surveys: 1976 Replication.

As described in Methodology and Sampling above, the 1970 national subscriber surveys were repeated in both countries during 1976. Mailings were made to 1000 subscribers to Consumer Reports in March and to 1000 subscribers to test in October. The methods and questions used were essentially identical to the 1970 study, with the following exceptions:

1. Some variables were omitted in the interest of a more concise questionnaire.
2. Only one follow-up letter was used, because of budgetary constraints.
3. DM subscribers were not included in the survey because of difficulty in obtaining cooperation on use of the subscriber list at the desired time of the study.

Usable responses were received from 567 Consumer Reports subscribers and 746 test subscribers.

The analysis of the longitudinal data--particularly the cross-cultural aspects--is at a very preliminary stage at this point. The German data has just been edited and compiled, and little multivariate analysis or statistical testing of any kind has been completed. We have, however, had the opportunity to examine the frequency counts and basic statistics for the German data, and do some in-depth comparison of the U.S. studies. In this beginning work, some interesting patterns and trends have begun to surface, and we would like to comment on a few of these without any claim to statistical significance or finished research conclusions.

Given the four national samples, several types of comparisons are possible--intra country, inter-country, over time, and various combinations. In this instance, the emphasis will be on the change over time in each country, and a search for "universals" in those changes: trends which seem to be present in both countries for the period studied. It has been our conviction that among many other interesting qualities, Information Seekers are on the cutting edge of consumer concerns and attitudes, and may serve as leading indicators of broader trends in consumer attitudes and behavior. If this is true, universal trends identified here may well presage international trends of importance to policy-makers.

Tables 8-12 summarize the longitudinal results from a number of selected areas, some of which have been covered earlier in this paper with respect to the 1970 study alone. Again, results are displayed for clarity as "index numbers" where a positive number indicates a highly favorable attitude or strong agreement, and a high negative number indicates an unfavorable attitude or strong disagreement.

From this early vantage point in the longitudinal study, three items seem worthy of comment:

1. Attitudinal and perceptual changes among Information Seekers are consistent across cultures.
2. "Creeping cynicism" seems to characterize the IS in both countries.
3. A resurgence of consumer self-confidence and self-sufficiency is evident in both countries.

B. Consistency in Direction of Change. In the limited documentation offered in Tables 8-11, there is a surprising amount of consistency in the direction and magnitude of change over time in attitude and perceptions between IS in the two countries. The four tables array responses on a number of topics, including general attitudes toward consumption-related concerns, perceived information usage, perceived risk, satisfaction, and advertising attitudes. In the 48 comparable variables measuring these diverse topics, 39 of the 1970-76 changes in attitude or perception are in the same direction between countries and only 9 are in opposite directions.

This is another indication among many that there is strong similarity in attitudes, perceptions, and behavior among this group of cross-cultural consumer sophisticates. In addition to the evidence in the earlier part of this paper, we also have done extensive factor-analytic studies on the various samples, and have found consistency in factor structure across country and time for such dimensions as consumer satisfaction, advertising attitudes, agency evaluation criteria, and others.

C. Creeping Cynicism. In keeping with recent trends, the Information Seekers show deteriorating attitudes toward a number of institutions and items of consumer interest. Advertising attitudes, in particular, plummeted in both countries during the six year period, both overall, and for each of seven individual dimensions measured (Table 11). Business in general fared just slightly better than advertising--the only encouraging word a more favorable opinion of businessmen's honesty in the U.S. (Table 8). Even the product testing agencies themselves did not escape unscathed in this biased sample of users. Despite a high degree of confidence on most dimensions of performance, 10 of 14 measures were lower in 1976 than in 1970, and all of the six measures in the critical attitudes toward reliability and credibility are less favorable (Table 12). Because of exclusion of DM from the 1976 study, German data are not strictly comparable, and are not included.

The bad news to business policy makers is that these thoughtful consumers feel steadily less favorable toward business in general and advertising in particular. The good news, if it may be regarded as such, is that they feel unfavorable toward many other things as well.

D. Resurgence of Consumer Self-Confidence. A surprising find in the 1976 data is the strong pattern of increase in self-confidence and self-reliance among the Information Seekers. The consumer movement in general has been fraught with tales of the woes of the individual consumer, who finds himself increasingly helpless in a broadening array of more complex products and less useful information. Somehow, these information-sensitive buyers seem to envision themselves as running counter to this pattern; a number of individual readings suggest increased confidence in their ability to influence their own destiny in the marketplace.

In the general attitudes in Table 8, there has been a strong increase in perceived planning for purchases, perceived ability to get value for dollars spent, and to judge quality differences. There is also a sharp increase in three of the four measures of product opinion leadership in the two countries. In the use of information sources in specific durable and auto purchases (Table 9), the strongest increases are in personal observation and use of the product tests, while most other sources were perceived to have decreased in importance since 1970.

Perceived risk in the purchase situation was sharply down for both products and both countries in the most powerful screening question (Table 10). There is a variety of evidence throughout the data that this group of interested super-consumers perceive themselves as better able to cope with the pitfalls of shopping now than six years earlier.

Overall, then, in this limited view of the new data, the IS would seem to feel worse about some of the central institutions in their marketplace, and to show surprising consistency across cultural boundaries in whatever they feel about their role in consumption.

E. Some Selected U.S. Findings. Although the focus of the conference is obviously directed toward the cross-cultural aspects of our study, it may be of some interest to mention a few of the U.S.findings, where the analysis has been further developed. Some thumb-nail findings which have resulted from multivariate analysis:

1. Factor analysis of the advertising variables results in two clearly-structured factors--social and economic dimensions (as listed in Table 11). The social factor became less important in determining the individual's overall attitude toward advertising in 1976 than it was in 1970 (as determined by regression analysis).

2. Use of product test reports in specific purchase decisions seems to be associated more with routine use in all relevant decisions than with the nature of the individual decision itself (more habitual than situation specific).

3. Use of product test reports in a specific purchase is associated with significantly higher product satisfaction.

4. Factor analysis of the agency evaluation variables results in three well-structured factors (as listed in Table 12). As suggested by Table 12, multivatiate T tests show significantly lower satisfaction with all three dimensions in 1976, with the largest change in the Reliability-Credibility factor.

V. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A. Attending to the Information Seeker. We know that the preponderance of the Information Seekers are highly educated, middle class professional-managerial people. As they are a good deal more information conscious than average consumers, IS in practice tend to be the direct beneficiaries of CI programs. In a country like Sweden where the CI programs of the past were mainly financed by taxes this was bound to raise a political issue. In the spirit of nivelation (achieving equality by leveling downward) characteristic of socialism in its more extreme forms, Swedish consumer radicals have demanded, and achieved, the cancellation of local comparative testing and information labeling programs. On the other hand, for those of us who have faith in the merits of consumer sovereignty and open markets there is a need to reemphasize the increasing urgency of public as well as private policies aimed at

fortifying the Information Seekers, increasing their numbers and stimulating information consciousness among consumers in general.

In open market democracies the Information Seekers are the shock troops in the perennial struggle to maintain and increase consumer sovereignty. We know that the IS, more than average consumers, will

1. personally enforce consumer rights
2. personally exercise consumer responsibilities;
3. keep suppliers on their toes by pinpointing poor service, deficiencies in products, out-of-stock conditions, misleading advertising and other malpractices;
4. voluntarily finance CI programs;
5. disseminate information and advice to fellow consumers; and
6. serve as proxy purchasing agents for many less information conscious and planful consumers.

Someone may object to the pacesetter role of the IS, feeling it undesirable that average consumers (AC) pick up middle class values and tastes that they can ill afford or that are out of touch with their styles of life. There is actually little ground for this objection. Individualization of demand is stronger among IS than among AC. At the same time, it is probably true that on balance IS are more concerned with the functional features of products than AC. Important, too, is the fact that many AC in effect are IS when it comes to certain products of special interest to them. Finally, even if on occasion IS might be considered as exercising undue influence in the marketplace we would consider this a state of affairs vastly preferable to the only alternative mankind has seemed able to come up with thus far: the committee of wise persons who know better than the consumer himself what is good for him.

In the end, it seems to us, the question is, Should we deprive all consumers of the right to be informed just because only a minority make use of it? It is analogous to the question, Should we abolish national parks because only 15 percent of the population visit them? The answer is "no." We do not want equality where in practice it essentially means a leveling down. What we want is equality of opportunity with focus on <u>mobility</u>: everyone must be free to become an Information Seeker. An indispensible part of this upward thrust is a comprehensive set of policies aimed at the emancipation of underprivileged consumers. Average consumers are most readily helped along the way by consumer education and simplified CI programs.

The IS do perform the role of St. George; they are the vigilantes of the marketplace. In effect, the IS are agents of a <u>market improvement policy</u>. Thus, they constitute a public good in more than one sense! Indeed, we may assume that as a group they mean a great deal more to the functioning of open market systems than all antitrust enforcement agencies rolled into one.

B. <u>An Agenda for Business.</u> It is in the temper of the times to think only of government as a maker of consumer policy. Yet it is clearly true that business, consumer groups, the media and educational institutions--singly or in pluralist cooperation--actually or potentially are equally major actors in the consumer policy arena. Business especially in its

own enlightened self-interest could and should do a great deal more in CI-related areas, both at the firm level and collectively. If it chooses to "lie low," the need for improved product information is likely to be met by other policymakers, who typically will have less expertise as regards any given product class.

Business' single most important means of communicating with consumers is advertising. In both Germany and the United States, the prevention of misleading advertising emerged as a key consumerist concern. Business will simply have to do a more aggressive job of purging itself in this area, or find that others will do this job on behalf of consumers. But surpressing misleading information is not nearly enough. An even more important item on the business agenda is to make advertising and sales promotion more informative. One excellent way of making ads and mail-order catalogs more informative is to use material from CI programs to the extent this is permissible. Let the package inform, not deceive. Facilitate comparability by sensible and fair comparative advertising, by unit pricing, by providing an assortment that offers real choice, and by participating in fairs, collective displays and multibrand outlets. Most retailers could vastly improve sales training to upgrade clerks into consumer consultants, and large retailers should make much broader use of consumer corners for advice, information and educational materials. Owner's manuals and assembly instructions could be markedly improved. Warranties could be made more specific and yet more understandable. Individual firms need to see the provision of superior information as an important new strategy for gaining differential advantage in the marketplace.

Business should also learn to look upon market communications as a genuinely two-way information flow system. In the past the emphasis on outbound communication (advertising and sales promotion) has been onesided indeed. Marketing research, when existing, is not only given a budget that typically is totally trivial next to advertising; it is also generally confined to issues of interest to the producer, i.e., questions that may or may not be of consumer relevance. Certainly conventional marketing research has next to nothing to do with a consumer satisfaction audit. Yet, ten or twenty years from now such audits may be as commonplace as employee satisfaction surveys are today among progressive companies. Most businesses do get some unrequested information from consumers in the form of complaints. It is characteristic of today's situation that very rarely is such information used as input to quality control and product planning managers. Typically, complaints handling is a function existing in splendid isolation.

This brings us to some of the things business could do in cooperation with others, notably consumers. In the past decade or two of consumerism we have witnessed a kind of "fighting on the barricades" in most affluent countries. We firmly believe that the time has now come when both business and consumer groups are ready to sit down for problem-solving of mutual interest, just as management and labor have learned to do after an initial period of mutual suspicion. As part of this process consumer affairs management must be

given much more weight in corporate affairs. Also, through this channel, and/or by means of consumer sounding boards, panels and surveys, consumer inputs may be of value to product planning, advertising and other aspects of marketing strategy.

Whether in the interest of long-term survival of the open market system or as a matter of social responsibility or as an element of a superior competitive information strategy, it behooves business to do what it can to promote voluntary CI programs together with consumers and perhaps other interested parties such as independent experts and government. Of special value here would be a combined informative-labeling and quality-marking program, as detailed in Consumer Information Systems. Whatever the effect on the individual firms, American business would do consumers a tremendous favor by hastening the conversion to the metric system, and by loyally using that splendid opportunity for package size standardization.

A reward of more straightforward product information will be fewer complaints. But better CI will also increase consumer satisfaction. In the long run, consumer satisfaction is the single most important determinant of business survival, both at the firm and at the system level.

It may be noted finally that the cosmopolitan nature of the IS makes them a clientele of natural interest to the multinational corporation. In effect, the MNC is able to seek out the IS group in any industrially advanced country around the North Atlantic with a relative minimum of adjustments in marketing strategy needed to take into account local variations in taste and lifestyle. The company aiming directly at the mass market of average consumers, on the other hand, is faced with the fact that this segment generally embodies considerable intercultural variation, which may call for imaginative and, sometimes, expensive heterogeneity in local marketing strategies.

C. CI Program Implications. A finding of crucial significance to CI programs is that a wealth of data of direct relevance to policy-making and program planning by CI bodies is readily obtainable by survey research. A great paradox it is indeed that, with the notable exceptions of CU and the British Consumers' Association, CI organizations around the world have done very little to find out what their own consumer audience really is and what its desires are.

Our results emphasize the singular importance of integrity and credibility in CI programs. There can be no doubt that this is the prime requirement for long-term viability of CI organizations. It is also clear that being a non-profit organization and refusing to accept advertising are powerful means of establishing integrity. However, they are not the only means. While DM--a for-profit organization freely accepting ads--has somewhat less credibility among consumers than either test or CR, the striking fact is rather that it enjoys such a high rate of consumer confidence. This is especially remarkable considering its free-wheeling and sometimes flamboyant style. One might add that Good Housekeeping and Parents' enjoy enormous goodwill as quality certifying organizations in the U.S., even though they carry considerable

advertising and their modes of operation and test procedures are shrouded in mist. Whether this confidence is justified we are not able to say, due to the relative secrecy of their operations; but they exemplify the observation that an image of credibility may be built by other means than refusing advertising or being non-profit. In a similar vein, we seem to have found that sponsorship of CI organizations, as long as it is not confined to producer interests alone, or to producer-government combinations, is less critical to public confidence than one might perhaps assume. (This statement may be more valid in Europe than in the United States.) Interestingly, in the case of governmentally sponsored organizations, an important criterion seems to be that the public perceive the everyday operations of the program as effectively isolated from political influence.

Whatever outside observers may think about Best Buy and other types of recommendations in comparative test reports, it is abundantly clear that subscribers to these reports, in every country where such advice is given, want such recommendations.

Any truly comparative international study raises the issue of the cross-cultural transferability of findings. We have already seen that the Information Seekers constitute a significant minority of great significance to the market system in all industrialized countries of the North Atlantic Community. The similarity in IS values wherever they are found indicates that the technology of comparative testing (including types of products and testing methods, reporting formats, Best Buy and similar recommendations, emphasis on integrity, and so on) is indeed freely transferable from one of these societies to the next. As always, some adjustments have to be made to local environments, such as with respect to degree of cooperation with producers, the selection of specific products and brands to be tested (sometimes even with respect to the mix of characteristics to be tested). But by and large these problems are not insuperable. As one might expect under the circumstances, a fair amount of international cooperation and experimentation in testing has taken place. In our view a great deal more could be accomplished in this area.

D. Consumers' Liberation Calls for Decentralized, Pluralist CI Systems.

Independent CI programs come in many guises: comparative testing, informative labeling, quality marking and, on the horizon, computerized CI data banks. Sponsorship of such programs is also diverse: consumer groups, non-profit foundations, government and business, singly or jointly. Although there has been little systems thinking in the past, there is need to view all CI programs existing in a given culture as constituting a CI system. Furthermore, the CI system should be viewed as a part of the total marketing communications system, which also comprises advertising, personal selling, interpersonal communication, consumer education and complaints, marketing research, and so on. The opportunities for synergy and reinforcement are great. To give but one example: the impact of a labeling program will increase dramatically if business firms reprint the labels in their own advertising. Obviously, there are also somewhat opposite needs of independence and experimentation. We are convinced that in a pluralist system the benefits of both competition and cooperation can be obtained without incurring an overdose of either. 29

There can be no doubt about it: "The idea of the autonomous and responsible individual is at the very core of Western Civilization." For democracy to survive in the long run, this idea applies in all areas of life: in politics, in our personal relations and in the marketplace. The prime object of consumer policy is to foster self-reliance and implement consumer rights in an open market. The principal vehicles of consumers' liberation are education and information. There is also a role for protective measures of various kinds. But new protective measures should not be adopted lightly or without serious reflection on undesirable side effects that typically attend them. Although some protective measures (antitrust, for example) aim at keeping markets open, most protective measures constrict the area of consumer choice. In effect, they are market replacement measures.

Consumers' liberation calls for equality of opportunity in decision-making--decision-making in meeting individual and family needs that develop spontaneously or in pluralist interaction, and are satisfied in the same manner. Authoritarians--left wing or right wing--contemptuously speak of "contrived needs." Probably some of our needs are in this category. But better a few contrived needs than a multitude of ordained needs, needs specified for us by the "Besser-Wissers" (the folks who know better than you do yourself what is good for you). After all, we trust individuals with the choice of mate, career, employer and neighborhood in which to live. Why should we second guess them when they choose products and brands?

Thus, the rationale of CI programs is simple. It is the liberation of the citizen in his role of consumer. That role is a major one, whatever our interests or stations in life. CI is in and of itself an instrument to enrich the quality of life. It helps us free time and resources for other concerns than purely material ones. It helps us save on material resources for society as a whole. It has virtually nothing to do with inculcating or reinforcing materialism as such.

It is imcompatible with the idea of a free society to prevent anyone from spending his money foolishly, but it is quite within the scope of this ideal to assist people in spending their money less ignorantly. The costs of doing this are miniscule relative to the costs of everyday commercial information.

In the end it may well be that the principal effect of such programs is analogous to that of the Sherman Antitrust Act of the United States, whose mere "omnibrooding presence" affects the very ambient of business, even though the specific effects of antitrust have proven hard to measure concretely. Antitrust is an instrument of perfecting the open market system. Let it not be forgotten that in a free society the market itself is the greatest comparative testing agency of them all!

We have argued the need for integration of CI programs into an overall consumer information system. To the extent that the parts of the system reinforce each other and the wastes of overlap are avoided, this will be all to the good. However, care should be taken to decentralize the units of the system and to encourage different sponsorship of the parts--and for two reasons. First, the field is still in need of free-wheeling experimentation and innovation. Second--and most importantly--only by decentralization and differentiation in

sponsorship can we guard against the ever-present possibilities of abuse.

After all, knowledge is power. A monopoly on information would be worse than one on a product. Hidden informers would be worse than hidden persuaders, and we do not want our testmakers to become our tastemakers. Freedom of consumer information is quite as important as freedom of the press.

FOOTNOTES

1. We are including here such nations as Japan, Hong-Kong and Taiwan.

2. Hans B. Thorelli, The Federal Antitrust Policy--Origination of an American Tradition (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press; London: Allen and Unwin, 1954).

3. Hans B. Thorelli and Sarah V. Thorelli, Consumer Information Handbook: Europe and North America (New York: Praeger, 1974).

4. Hans B. Thorelli and Sarah V. Thorelli, Consumer Information Systems and Consumer Policy (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1977).

5. Raymond A. Bauer and Stephen A. Greyser, Advertising in America: The Consumer View (Boston: Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, 1968).

6. Central Statistical Bureau of Norway, Report No. 8, Undersökelse Om Forbruker-Rapporten, etc. (Oslo: Statistisk Sentralbyra, 1970).

7. The complete questionnaire included additional sections to cover other aspects of the overall research project. It is reprinted in The Information Seekers.

8. See Sidney Siegal, Nonparametric Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1956).

9. The comparisons between ACs in Germany and the U.S. by themselves would seem to be less meaningful within the context of this project, because ACs comprise the whole range of heterogeneity one finds in the population at large. By comparison, subscribers are a much more homogeneous group.

10. Helmut Becker, Consumer Information and the Image of Advertising (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1971; and Jack L. Engledow, The Impact of Consumer Reports Ratings on Purchase Behavior and Post-Purchase Satisfaction (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, unpublished doctoral dissertation, 1971).

11. See Hans B. Thorelli and Sarah V. Thorelli, Consumer Information Handbook: Europe and North America (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974); and Thorelli, Becker, and Engledow, The Information Seekers: An International Study of Consumer Information and Advertising Image (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1975).

12. Sample propositions are listed in the Appendix.

13. Several studies can be cited here: Warner, Meek and Eells, Social Class in America (New York: Harper and Row, 1960); Hollingshead and Redlich, Social Class and Mental Illness (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958); James Carman, The Application of Social Class in Market Segmentation (Berkeley, California: University of California, 1965); and Rich and Jain, "Social Class and Life Cycle as Predictors of Shopping Behavior," Journal of Marketing Research, Vol. V (February 1968), pp. 41-9.

14. See E. Scheuch, "Sozialprestige und Soziale Schichtung," in Soziale Schichtung und Mobilitat, ed. by D.V. Glass and R. Koenig (Cologne, 1961), pp. 65-103).

15. DIVO-Institut, Der Deutsche Markt in Zahlen (Frankfurt: DIVO-INMAR GmbH., 1970).

16. See G. Katona, B. Strumpel, and E. Zahn, Aspirations and Affluence (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1971), pp. 89 ff.

17. See Bauer and Greyser, Advertising in America: The Consumer View (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1968).

18. It may well be possible that the Indianapolis population is somewhat more favorable to advertising than Americans in general, and that the Frankfurt population is a bit more critical than Germans in general.

19. The formulation of the last question was adopted following Bauer, Greyser. We believe that "advertising does not persuade people to buy things they do not need" would have been a happier formulation.

20. See Hans B. Thorelli, "Concentration of Information Power Among Consumers," Journal of Marketing Research (November 1971), pp. 427-32.

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Thorelli, Hans B. and Sarah V. Thorelli. Consumer Information Handbook: Europe and North America, New York: Praeger, 1974, (cited as Handbook in this work; reader is advised to get second printing, 1975).

Thorelli, Hans. B. and Sarah V. Thorelli. Consumer Information Systems and Consumer Policy, Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1977.

APPENDIX: SAMPLE PROPOSITIONS

		Evidence
1.	Subscribers (Subs) belong to higher social strata than average consumer (ACs)	Yes
2.	Subs are younger than ACs	Mixed
3.	Subs perceive themselves as more planful than do ACs	Yes
4.	Subs identify themselves as opinion leaders more often than do ACs	Yes
5.	Subs identify themselves as early adopters more often than do ACs	No
6.	Subs are less favorable to advertising than ACs	G.--No U.S.--Yes
7.	Subs usage of media differs from that of ACs	Yes

TABLE 9
INFORMATION SOURCES IMPORTANCE RATINGS
(by Index Numbers[a])

		United States			Germany		
		1970	1976	Change	1970	1976	Change
Durable Product	**Personal**						
	Personal Observation	68	82	+14	67	69	+2
	Past Experience	25	32	+7	25	15	-10
	Friends, Relatives, etc.	8	3	-5	3	13	+10
	Commercial						
	Advertising	-9	-14	-5	-36	-55	-19
	Salesman	-27	-47	-20	-34	-57	-23
	Independent						
	Consumer Reports	55	61	+6	-	-	-
	DM	-	-	-	32	NA	NA
	test	-	-	-	40	81	NA[b]
	Other Mags. or Newsp.	-32	-42	-10	-13	-45	-32
Auto	**Personal**						
	Personal Observation	81	93	+12	81	87	+6
	Past Experience	47	43	-4	50	47	-3
	Friends, Relatives, etc.	16	2	-14	13	10	-3
	Commercial						
	Advertising	-16	-18	-2	-37	-48	-11
	Salesman	-21	-25	-4	-41	-55	-14
	Independent						
	Consumer Reports	36	47	+11	-	-	-
	DM	-	-	-	6	-	NA
	test	-	-	-	-5	-12	NA[b]
	Other Mags. or Newsp.	-24	-32	-8	10	8	-10

[a]Index = % of sample Very Important or Important minus % Sample Unimportant or Very Unimportant

[b]1976 sample not strictly comparable in this question.

TABLE 10
PERCEIVED RISK AND SATISFACTION MEASURES - DURABLE PRODUCT & AUTO
(by Index numbers[a])

	United States			Germany		
	1970	1976	Change	1970	1976	Change
DURABLE PURCHASE						
Perceived Risk						
. . . worried great deal . . .	17	-14	-31	62	51	-11
. . . spent more time & effort	2	-4	-6	14	15	+1
Product Satisfaction						
. . . what I expected	72	78	+6	75	86	+12
. . . would recommend to a friend	77	81	+4	77	80	+3
. . . same purchase with more shopping	55	54	-1	61	64	+3
Information Satisfaction						
. . . little trouble finding brand differences	25	20	-5	30	33	+3
. . . plenty of information available	42	46	+4	48	67	+19
. . . advertising was helpful.	20	14	-6	39	22	-17
AUTO PURCHASE						
Perceived Risk						
. . . worried great deal	37	11	-28	68	53	-15
. . . spent more time & effort	41	44	+3	19	20	+1
Product Satisfaction						
. . . what I expected	57	60	+3	71	71	-
. . . would recommend to friend	72	68	-4	73	76	-3
. . . same purchase with more shopping	55	51	-4	64	60	-4
Information Satisfaction						
. . . little trouble finding brand differences	32	37	+5	59	63	+4
. . . plenty of information available	58	53	-5	59	55	-4
. . . advertising was helpful	-15	-33	-18	32	23	-9

[a]Index = % slightly or strongly agreeing minus % slightly or strongly disagreeing

8.	Subs are more concerned with availability of information as a buying criterion than ACs	Yes
9.	Subs are less concerned with availability of credit than ACs	Yes
10.	Subs are relatively more concerned with performance, economy of operation and price, ACs more with style, dealer reputation and credit	Mixed
11.	Subs are generally more satisfied with their purchases than ACs	G.--Yes U.S.--No
12.	Subs who actually used CI data are more satisfied with their purchases than ACs	U.S.--Yes
13.	Subs are more liberal than ACs	Mixed
14.	Subs have stronger "consumer activist" attitudes than ACs	Yes
15.	Product test reports will tend to have similar clientele regardless of sponsorship	Yes
16.	DM has somewhat less credibility than test and CR	Yes
17.	As a cosmopolitan group, Information Seekers in the two countries exhibit certain characteristics not present among German and American ACs	Yes
18.	Americans and Germans agree that advertising is essential, but disagree with the idea that advertising does not persuade people to buy things unnecessarily	Yes
19.	There is a positive relationship between attitudes to advertising as a general medium and the perceived importance of advertising as an information source in specific purchases	Yes
20.	People who tend to have an unfavorable view of advertising in general will also tend to have a more favorable view of comparative testing than advertising, both in general and in regard to such particulars as trustworthiness and helpfulness	Yes

TABLE 8

GENERAL ATTITUDE COMPARISONS

(by Index Numbers[a])

	United States			Germany		
	1970	1976	Change	1970	1976	Change
Planfulness						
Enjoy planning work	74	83	+3	77	79	+2
Better at getting value for money	31	56	+25	12	28	+16
Able to judge quality differences	-6	24	+30	20	34	+14
Liberal-Conservative						
You can change human nature	2	27	+25	-6	-1	+5
Government should control business more	-12	-25	-13	32	45	+13
Welfare does not cause people to work less than they should	-57	-61	-4	20	-18	-38
Opinion Leadership						
Likely to influence group opinion	50	71	+21	32	26	-6
Likely to be asked product advice	32	53	+21	32	64	+32
Innovation						
Usually try brands before others	3	-5	-8	20	19	-1
Usually one of first to try new product	24	-33	-9	-28	-30	-2
Business						
Businessmen are as honest as others	28	44	+6	19	-4	-23
Business does job well of giving good products for reasonable price	-2	-8	-6	-13	-21	-8

[a]Index = % of sample slightly or strongly agree minus % slightly or strongly disagree.

TABLE 11
ATTITUDES TOWARD PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF ADVERTISING
(by Index Numbers[a])

	United States			Germany		
	1970	1976	Change	1970	1976	Change
Economic Aspects						
Advertising:						
. . . is essential	75	66	-9	62	56	-6
. . . results in lower prices	-35	-38	-3	-32	-47	-15
. . . raises the standard of living	20	0	-20	9	-8	-17
. . . results in better products	22	-18	-38	10	-36	-46
Social Aspects						
Advertising:						
. . . does not insult the intelligence	-23	-52	-29	-13	-51	-38
. . . presents a true picture	-39	-52	-13	-45	-60	-15
. . . does not persuade people to buy unneeded products	-64	-74	-10	-61	-76	-15

[a]Index = % sample agreeing slightly or strongly with statements minus % disagreeing slightly or strongly.

Overall Attitude						
My attitude toward advertising is: (strongly favorable to strongly unfavorable)	22		-8	-30	47	-30

[a]Index = % sample favorable minus % sample unfavorable.

TABLE 12
EVALUATION OF AGENCY & PRODUCT TESTS (U.S. ONLY)
(by Index Numbers[a])

	Consumer Reports		
	1970	1976	Change
Reliability-Credibility			
Information is reliable . . .	90	72	-18
. . . believe in independence & integrity	91	87	-4
. . . have confidence in testing methods	91	88	-3
. . . no government or business influence	63	58	-5
. . . recommendations are useful	89	84	-5
. . . generally satisfied with recommended products	87	75	-12
Clarity-Availability-Timeliness			
. . . information not too old	38	37	-1
. . . right copy generally available	44	46	+2
. . . style is bright and stimulating	50	51	+1
. . . not too much technical detail	56	70	+14
. . . information clear & easy to read	86	76	-10
Relevance			
. . . tests right features	66	51	-15
. . . tests right products	55	49	-6
Misc			
. . . does not stress safety too much	27	63	+36

[a]Index = % agreeing slightly or strongly minus % disagreeing slightly or strongly